

Snowmachine Riding

Anywhere else in the United States it is referred to as snowmobiling but in Alaska we can not wait to “snowmachine.” Alaskans pray for good snow conditions so that we can thoroughly enjoy this favorite outdoor winter activity.

Whether you like to ride trails through a wilderness forest or take on the deep powder in the mountains, Interior Alaska has some of the best snowmachine riding to be discovered. Alaska State Parks and Recreation and the Bureau of Land Management have hundreds of miles of trails in the Interior along with winter cabins you can rent so you can extend your winter outing overnight. Much of Interior Alaska is available for snowmachining but it is important to know where you are riding and always respect private property.

If you do not own a snowmachine the Outdoor Recreation Center will rent you one and teach you how to ride it. The Outdoor Recreation Center rents two types of snowmachines, one for hunting and off trail riding and the other for on trail riding.

Whether you are a novice or experienced snowmachiner safe riding requires knowledge, practice and planning. When snowmachining your chances of finding someone in trouble or having trouble yourself is a distinct possibility. The following safety tips should be followed before and during your ride.

- Know the law. The State of Alaska requires you register your snowmachine and Ft. Wainwright and Ft. Richardson have riding regulations. Read the Army Outdoor Recreation Regulation Supplement covering your chosen activity.
- Gear Up. Every time you ride be sure to wear protective gear and warm clothing. Wear layers of clothing so you can add or remove clothing depending on the weather. A safety-certified helmet, warm gloves and clothing along with warm boots are your best bet for optimum protection.
- Plan ahead. Plan for breakdowns and injuries. Carry your owner’s manual, extra drive belt, extra spark plugs, a tow rope, a small tool kit, a flashlight, a first aid kit and some survival items including space blankets, waterproof matches/road flares, compass/GPS and map, and cell phone. Take along extra water and high energy foods. If you are

riding in the mountains you will also need to pack an avalanche shovel, beacons and collapsible probe pole. Always take snowshoes regardless of the distance you plan on traveling or riding conditions you are expecting.

- Tell someone. Create a trip plan and tell someone where you are going, who you are with, when you expect to return and what equipment you have with you.
- Ride within your limits and always safely. Maintain a safe speed and always scan your surroundings for potential hazards and obstacles.
- Take a friend. It is more fun and much safer to take a friend along. Don't snowmachine alone.
- Beware of water. Drowning is a leading cause of snowmachine deaths in Alaska. Never take risks when it comes to water.
- Be sharp. Alcohol, cold and fatigue can all impair your ability to make sound judgments. Never mix alcohol with your winter outings.

Alaska winter outings on snowmachines with friends can create memories that will last a lifetime. With some knowledge, planning and practice your memories will be good ones.

For more information about outdoor activities on military lands, call Army Natural Resources 353-6490 at Ft. Wainwright, 384-3909 at Ft. Richardson, or 873-1615 at Donnelly Training Area; or visit www.usarak.army.mil/conservation.